THE ARYA SAMAJ
&
HINDUISM

BY

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The Arya Samaj and Hinduism

In one word, the Arya Samaj means Vedism. Hinduism too holds the Vedas in great regard. But there is a difference. Ordinarily Hinduism is based upon the Vedas. The very name of the Vedas inspires awe in the mind of a Hindu. Whatever the sect or sub-sect, there is such a mysterious reverence for the Vedas, that if a book of the Vedas were presented to an ordinary Hindu, either he will bow his head devoutly to it, or ejaculate with a superstitious suspicion. "No, this cannot be the Veda ; this is an ordinary book." Which means that the Vedas should be something unspeakably lofty and un-imaginably holy. He cannot for a moment be persuaded to believe that an earthly thing of paper and ink can ever embody the divine wisdom called the Veda.

But you cannot say that Hinduism and Vedism are identical. In Hinduism the Vedas are to be worshipped and not to be lived. Of one thousand and one religious ceremonies which are an essential factor of Hinduism a majority are non-vedic or even anti-vedic. Of the basic doctrines, philosophic or quasi-philosophic, a great many do not conform to the Vedas. Of the formulae that are

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recited on auspicious occasions, hardly any consist of Vedic verses. Of the sacred books that are daily read, the Vedas form no part. Yet the Hindus are Vedists because they believe that their religion has directly descended from the Vedas and their religious books, though not themselves the Vedas, claim to be a Kaliyug (Iron-age) edition of the ancient scriptures of that name.

There are no doubt, a few sects which do not trace their origin to the Vedas The Radha Swamis, for instance, are all Hindus and are of a very late origin. They do not base their tenets on the Vedas. They claim to have superseded the Vedas. The Sikhs also come under that category. Then there are several sects with some saints as their founders, much of whose doctrines is simila to the doctrines of common Hinhu. Most of their sayings go the length of belittling the Vedas and most people think that they are non-vedic. But if you read their books very closely and analytically, you will find that they level their criticism mostly at the bookishness of a religion, as distinct from its inner merits, rather than Vedism itself. Such sayings are common to the saints of all religions. Their main purpose is not so much to criticise any particular book or a set of tenets, as to show that mere form does not constitute a true religion. The attitude of Kablr, Dadu or even Nanak is the same towards the Vedas, as of Maulana Room towards the Quran. They do not mean more than

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to say that mere recitation of sacred books or observance of certain outer forms of ceremonies is no good as long as there are no corresponding inner realities.

The Jains are expressly non-vedic or even antivedic. The Lingaits are between the Jains and the Hindus. But there is much common ground, though not strictly religious, yet political and social at least, between the Jains and Lingaits on one hand and the Hindus on the other.

Not so with the Arya Samaj. It bases itself wholly on the Vedas. It is incumbent on all Arya Samajists to read the Vedas daily and to act upto them. This is their ideal.

Thus essentially the Arya Samajists are the same as the Hindus. Yet there are many differences and it is necessary to study them in details in order to understand the true relation between the Arya Samaj and the Hindus.

Let us first take the scriptural difference. I have already said that if all Hindus are taken into consideration, they are vaguely Vedic. 'Some believe in the Vedas. Others only half believe in them. And still others do not at all believe in them. Then again those who believe in the Vedas hold that though their religious origin is Vedic, the Vedas were meant only for *Sat Yug* or Golden age and that the present age (*Kali Yug*) is so deteriorated that men

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cannot reach the ideal of the Vedas and therefore sages have from time to time prescribed humbler scriptures called the Puranas to suit the taste and grade of the deteriorated people. This is why we do not find the Vedas extensively read among the Hindus. Those few highly advanced Pandits that read the Vedas, believe that others are not holy enough to touch the Vedas, to read them or even to hear them. When Swami Dayanand, himself a Brahmin of a respectable family, began to study the Vedas, he had much ado in securing their full texts. Out of two hundred and forty millions of Hindus, not even twenty-four possessed the Vedas. Even now when restrictions are so few and only nominal the orthodox section does not permit the study of the Vedas by the sudras and women folk. During the time of the great Raja Ram Mohan Roy, when he established the Brahmo Samaj, the Pandit had to read the Vedas through a hole in the upper story so that he might not be overheard by the persons of the fourth caste i. e. sudras. The Arya Samaj believes that the Vedas are meant for all ages and for all people, men and women, high and low. They read the Vedas loudly in meetings, they teach them to any who may be willing to do so, they bring out cheap editions of the Vedas, so that all people may understand what is in them. Every Arya Samajist feels proud to have the Vedas in his house.

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The Vedas are four in number—the Rig Veda the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, and the Atharva Veda. The Hindus as well as the Arya Samajists believe them of divine origin. It is claimed that when God made the universe. He gave the divine knowledge to his chosen sages named Agni, Vayu, Aditya, and Angirah, so that, it might stand a guide to all generations of men through their journey of life. But besides the Vedas there are books of the Brahmanas or discourses on rituals, of the Upanishadas or spiritual deliberations among the sages with copious references to the Vedic texts. The Arya Samaj regards them next to the Vedas. It does not include them among the Vedas nor it looks upon them as the final authority in as much as they are of human origin. Here is the difference between the Arya Samaj and the orthodox Pandits. The latter count the Brahmans and the Upanishads also as the Vedas.

The difference appears to be of merely academical interest. But it is practical too. The Vedas are more catholic. Their teachings suit all ages and all climes. The Brahmanas are particular applications of general rules. They are local and temporal. Hinduism has lost much of its catholicism simply because of the undue emphasis upon such rituals. Any rituals, however rationalistic in origin, can, if unduly emphasized, make a people priestridden. The Hindus are such a people. Thei rreligion has dwindled

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into a bundle of usages. The spirit has gone. A mere form remains. This all due to the fact that we had renounced the Vedas and accepted as the Vedas much which had only a semblance of them.

Swami Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj diagonosed the disease and investigated the cause too. Other reformers had come before him and realised the situation. They had seen that the Hindus were a fallen nation. They had found that dead rituals were victimising them, But they could not discover the cause of the disease. Swami Dayanand studied the Vedas and was wonder-struck that such lofty teachings as Vedic should be reduced to a cogeries of meaningless forms. He found that the Hindus had thrown corn and clung to the husk. He regarded it as inconsistent that the Hindus should believe the Vedas of divine origin and should at the same time, include the Brahmans and Upanishads also among the Vedas, as they undisputably contained much which was of later times. His reasoning was simple. He argued that if the Vedas were divine, they must have been revealed in the beginning of the Universe, for God could not have made people and left them without any light and if the Vedas come in the beginning of the creation they could not have reference to historial persons or events. And as the Brahmans and Upanishads both are full of scuh references, the only conclusion that can be valid is that these books are not the Vedas.

This teaching of Swami Dayanand revolutionized the whole realm of Hindu thought. He advised to throw away much that was alloy. And the best way of achieving this aim was to examine closely and define precisely the

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position of divine revelation in the Hindu religion. The basic principles to which Swami Dayanand adhered were the same as those of other great Hindu teachers. He plainly said that his was not a new path. But the strange fact is that those teachers, great as they were left this position unsettled and vague. For instance, Shankar Acharya also believed, like Swami Dayanand, that the Vedas were revelations, but as he did not define the Vedas, his commentaries of the Vedants and the Upanishadas are full of quotations from the Upanishadas which he calls the Vedas. His qnotations from the four Vedas are very few and far between. The result is that inspite of his philosophic discourses of exceptionally high order, he could not check Hinduism from being reduced to the superstitions of the grossest kind. Ramanuj Acharya, another equally great teacher did the same. He started his religion with a philosophy by no means inferior to that of Shankar. But further on he plunged deep into the legends of the Puranas and the result was a hopeless medley of philosophy legends, rituals and superstitions. He began with philosophy and ended in fetish-worship. This was all due to the fact that the main issue regarding the position of the Vedas remained obscure.

Swami Dayanand's first work was to clear this point. Unlike other Hindus he sifted what was truly and originally

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Vedic from what got mixed with it later on. He could not persuade himself to believe that everything written in Sanscrit was Vedic. He read the Puranas and was disgusted with them. He found several practices that were in clear contravention to the teachings of the Vedas. He saw that for several centuries it had been the practice of religious teachers to teach whatever pleased them under the name Vedic. Anything and every thing passed as Vedic. Any religious book passed as the Vedas. This made the whole Hinduism vague. People boasted that their religion was catholic. That was not the fact. In fact, main principle became flexible and superficial rites inflexible. Swami Dayanand called it anything but catholicism. To him it was a sign of weakness. He called it a great weakness. His writings are full of plaintive references that the once pure Vedic religion has been vitiated owing to मतमतान्तर or factitous creeds. When he first proclaimed that idolatory was against the Vedas, even great Pandits were taken by surprise. They wondered as to what the actual Vedas were. The memorable scrap of paper which the great synod of Pandits forwarded as Vedic testimony in favour of idol-worship in the great discussion that took place betwee them and Swami Deyanand in Benares in 1869 was merely a page from some Brahmana and not the Veda.

Briefly the position of the Arya Samaj is this. The

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four Vedas, *i. e.* the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda, are of final authority. The Brahmans, the Upanishadas, the Smirities and other human books are reliable only so far as they accord themselves to the Vedas. Anything found contrary may be rejected as spurious.

The Hindus are proverbially philosophical. They have been often blamed for this weakness. But you cannot deny that Hinduism means some particular philosophy. Philosophy cannot be expected to be dogmatic. They all agree only to differ. Nowhere is this saying so true as in the case of Hinduism. Monism qualified monism dualism, pluralism and hundreds of differences radical as well as minor can be found here. For every little creed there is some philosophy on its back. There is hardly any philosophy in any part of the World or in any age, ancient or modern, which has no counterpart in Hinduism. Hinduism has atheistics, theists and deists, dualists and non-dualists, materialists and spiritualists all. But the Arya Samaj has its own philosophy. It preaches monotheism but not monism. There is one and only one God. But God is not the only existence. There are other existences as well. God is the most supreme of them. The identity of souls with God is denied. Souls are as unborn and eternal as God, but they are finite in power, knowledge and magnitude.

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They are not all knowing, all-pervading and all powerful. Besides, there is one more thing, called matter which too is eternal. Matter and soul are the material cause of the Universe, while God is the Creator. The analogy of potter may be any approximate representation of the position. Just as the potter makes his pots out of earth. Just so does God create the universe out of the primordeal matter. Had there been God alone, there was neither possibility nor purpose of creating anything. The creator can not be the material cause as nothing can be made cut of nothing. The non-dualists believe that nothing can be created without a cause, that God is the creator, that the same God is the material cause too. Swami Dayanand rejects this view as he does not find any example in the Universe which might support the view that a doer can ever be a material cause. It was to escape this criticism that Shankar Acharya thought out the "Illusion" or "Maya' theory. He said that the universe that we live in, and of which we are a part, has no real existence but is merely a figment of nescience. Only God exists. All other things only *appear* to exist ; they are illusory. Swami Dayanand holds this view also untenable, as, if there exists only God and nothing but God, then there is no explanation for appearance or illusion.

The Arya Samaj brought about three great changes in the angle of vision of the Hindus. Hinduism had for cen-

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turies dwindled into a religion of mediators. Gurus (preceptors) and Avataras had divided godhead among themselves. Direct communion of the soul with God was altogther forgotten. Rama and Krishna, Ramanuja and Shankar, Ramanand and Kabir became substitutes for the Almigty. Not the maker, but the made, came to be worshipped. Swami Dayanand saw the viciousness of the system and tried to reform it. The Arya Samaj renders unto the Guru what is Guru's and unto God what is God's. Whoever your Guru, as long as you can directly realize the reflection of your maker within your own self, it is all right. The Guru can guide you to that end. He cannot be the end itself. He should only beckon you towards God. He should not stand between Him and his disciples. Most of the sections and sub-sections of Hinduism owe their origin to the viciousness of worshipping a particular Guru in place of God. A similar defect vitiated the teachings of Christianity in Europe when the Pope of Rome claimed to be the earthly representative of God and did in His name many things unworthy of a Guru. Swami Dayanand held that Hindu Gurudom was only counterpart of its western sister, Popedom. He saw with his own eyes in great centres of Indian religion that the Gurus instead of being spiritual helps to their disciples, made them instruments to their own self-indulgence. In his great work the Satyarth Prakash or "Light of Truth" he has very unsparingly brought to light the private doings of such Gurus. Himself

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a sage of very high order, he never advises his followers to blindly and sheepishly follow him. He does not claim for himself an unconditional obedience. He simply points to the teachings of the Vedas. The Arya Samaj has altogether done away with Gurudom. No Arya Samajist can ever set himself up as the earthly representative of God. This is the spiritual freedom that is the direct result of Swami Dayanand's teachings. If all the Hindus free themselves from this influence of Gurudom, whatever their other differences, they will have no difficulty in being united. The main principles of various Hindu cults are not so different that they cannot come closer. The main obstacle is these Gurus whose chief interest lies in emphasizing differences and making narrow fold for their disciples.

The 2nd point is universal brotherhood. Superiority of birth has for centuries been a canker in Hinduism. In a nation of such a long antiquity it is but natural. Traditional superiority of individuals easily passes to their families and then to their descendants which make a clan for themselves. When once grooves are made, they are further deepened by time and the result is a rigidity of caste-system. The Hindu Rishis and Hindu Kings rose up in the beginning on account of their intrinsic and individual merits and not on account of high birth. But very soon the distinction earned by their individual selves came to be claimed by their families. This is the origin of the

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caste-system which is nowadays ruining the Hindu Society. All reasonable Hindus want to do away with the shackles of caste. But they shoot off the mark. Somehow they think that in order to do away with caste, it is necessary to do away with religion also. They presume that caste is an ineliminable factor of Hinduism. Swami Dayanand says that the caste system which we see these days in India is quite contrary to the letter and spirit of the teachings of the Vedas, and must go. Swami Dayanand has thus struck at the root of the evil and created a great consciousness against caste.

The third very remarkable thing is that the gates of Hinduism have been thrown open for all and sundry. Whatever the birth, caste, creed or nationality, a man can embrace Vedism if he so desires. For centuries had Hinduism lost this allabsorbing power. Cults after cults arose ; reformers came in succession, patriots and saviours appeared, but this phase of Hinduism did not change. Hinduism had all along remained a mouse-trap with its mouth turned inside out. Crores of people left Hinduism or were forced to leave Hinduism with no hope for recovery. It was Swami Dayanand that touched the whole Hinduism with, so to speak, a magic wand and the whole aspect changed. The great Shudhi movement which invites all. Mohomedans, Christians, Europeans, Ameri-

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cans and what not, is the greatest achievement that Hinduism got ever since the old Vedic religion lapsed into insignificance.

To sum up, there is very little difference, religious or philosopnical between the essentials of Hinduism and the Arya Samaj, and yet but for the Arya Samaj, Hinduism would have been nowhere today. All the awakening that we find among the Hindus today, is the result, direct or indirect of Swami Dayanand's teachings. Hinduism was a skeleton without spirit. Swami Dayanand quickened that spirit into the body ; and lo ! Hinduism is a living organism today. The Arya Samaj has purged Hinduism of its inconsistencies, excrecenses and superfluities, it has released Hinduism of undesirable fetters. It has rejuvenated Hinduism. In short, it has made a dead religion alive. If the Hindus but correctly interpret the Arya Samaj, and in fact most Hindus do, then the day is not far that Hinduism and Arya Samaj will be one thing and Swami Dayanand will be acknowledged as the great saviour not of Hindus only, but of the whole world.

There are some persons who think that after bringing about Hindus awakening, the Arya Samaj has no further work to do and must disappear. This is not only ungrateful but wrong. It is a mistake to suppose that Hinduism can do without the Arya Samaj. Hinduism is a great ball of iron and the Arya Samaj that of fire. It is the contact

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of iron with fire that has made the iron ball so redhot. As soon as the ball of fire disappears, the iron ball that you see so hot, will begin to cool. Even at present we see this in practice. The Arya Samaj starts a few activities, say, the Shuddhi and the reclamation of the untouchables. Other Hindus follow suit and do a useful work. But as soon as the Arya Samaj slackens its activities or transfers them to other channels, we find the Hindu society again lulled to that sleep which it has been long enjoying.

The cause is not far to seek. It is futile to expect that the great work of revival of Vedism can be accomplished by only adopting a fraction of Swami Dayanand's programme. Unless and until Hinduism becomes one with the Arya Samaj, partial reform will not do. It may, for a time, do some superficial work; but the result cannot be lasting. Suppressing the disease is one thing and to uproot it altogether is another. The Arya Samaj means to do the latter.

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